

**CLAIMS**

Please amend Claims 1, 12, 23, 33, 43, and 53, and cancel Claims 6, 17, 28, 41, and 47, as shown below:

1. (Currently Amended) A communications device, comprising:  
a backplane;  
a plurality of backplane cards coupled to the backplane, each backplane card assigned a Media Access Control (MAC) address; and  
a backplane switch coupled to the backplane and operable to receive a first data packet with a first MAC address assigned to a backplane card and to communicate the first data packet to the backplane card assigned the first MAC address using the backplane;

wherein at least one backplane card is a gateway card coupled to a telephone network, the gateway card operable to receive from the telephone network a request to establish a telephone call with an external network device, to identify an Internet Protocol (IP) address associated with the network device, to process data from the telephone call into digital data packets, to associate the data packets with the identified IP address, and to communicate the data packets to the external network device using the backplane switch.

2. (Previously Presented) The communications device of Claim 1, wherein the backplane switch communicates the first data packet to the backplane card according to an Ethernet protocol.

3. ((Previously Presented) The communications device of Claim 1, wherein the backplane switch is further operable to receive a second data packet with a second MAC address assigned to an external network device and to communicate the second data packet to the network device assigned the second MAC address.

4. (Previously Presented) The communications device of Claim 3, wherein the backplane switch communicates the second data packet to the network device assigned the second MAC address by communicating the second data packet from an external port to a network switch for further communication to the network device.

5. (Original) The communications device of Claim 1, wherein the backplane includes a plurality of backplane buses, at least one of the backplane buses providing a dedicated bandwidth between a backplane card and the backplane switch.

6. (Canceled)

7. (Original) The communications device of Claim 6, wherein the external network device is an IP telephone.

8. (Previously Presented) The communications device of Claim 6, wherein:  
the gateway card is further operable to determine that the data packets include voice information and, in response, to assign a high priority level to the data packets by setting one or more priority bits in each of the data packets; and

the backplane switch is further operable to communicate the data packets according to the assigned priority level.

9. (Original) The communications device of Claim 1, wherein the backplane switch is further operable to examine one or more priority bits in the first data packet, to identify a quality of service level associated with the priority bits according to IEEE 802.1q, and to communicate the first data packet according to the identified quality of service level.

10. (Original) The communications device of Claim 1, wherein at least one backplane card is a gateway card coupled to a data network, the gateway card operable to receive data packets associated with an Internet Protocol (IP) address and to communicate the data packets to an external network device assigned the associated IP address using the backplane switch.

11. (Original) The communications device of Claim 1, wherein at least one of the backplane cards may be coupled to the backplane and de-coupled from the backplane while the communications device continues to operate.

12 (Currently Amended) A method of communicating data packets using a communications device including a backplane coupled to a backplane switch and a plurality of backplane cards, the method comprising:

receiving, at the backplane switch coupled to the backplane, a first data packet with a first Media Access Control (MAC) address assigned to one of the backplane cards coupled to the backplane; and

communicating the first data packet from the backplane switch to the backplane card assigned the first MAC address using the backplane;

receiving from a telephone network a request to establish a telephone call with an external network device;

identifying an Internet Protocol (IP) address associated with the external network device;

processing data from the telephone call into digital data packets;

associating the data packets with the identified IP address; and

communicating the data packets to the external network device using the backplane switch.

13. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 12, wherein communicating the first data packet from the backplane switch to the backplane card further comprises using an Ethernet protocol.

14. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 12, further comprising:

receiving at the backplane switch a second data packet with a second MAC address assigned to an external network device; and

communicating the second data packet from the backplane switch to the network device assigned the second MAC address.

15. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 14, wherein communicating the second data packet from the backplane device to the network device assigned the second MAC address comprises:

communicating the second data packet from an external port of the backplane switch to a network switch; and

communicating the second data packet from the network switch to the external network device assigned the second network address.

16. (Original) The method of Claim 12, further comprising providing a dedicated bandwidth between the backplane switch and at least one of the backplane cards using a backplane bus.

17. (Canceled)

18. (Original) The method of Claim 17, wherein the external network device is an IP telephone.

19. (Original) The method of Claim 17, further comprising:  
determining whether the data packets include voice information; and  
assigning a high priority level to the data packets by setting one or more priority bits in each of the data packets in response to determining that the data packets include voice information.

20. (Original) The method of Claim 12, further comprising:  
examining one or more priority bits in the first data packet;  
identifying a quality of service level associated with the priority bits according to IEEE 802.1q; and  
communicating the first data packet from the backplane switch to the backplane card according to the identified quality of service level.

21. (Original) The method of Claim 12, further comprising:  
receiving at a backplane card a second data packet from a data network;  
identifying an Internet Protocol (IP) address associated with the second data packet;  
communicating the second data packet to an external network device assigned the IP  
address using the backplane switch.

22. (Original) The method of Claim 12, wherein at least one of the backplane  
cards may be coupled to the backplane or de-coupled from the backplane while the  
communications device continues to operate.

23. (Currently Amended) A backplane card assigned a first Media Access Control  
(MAC) address and coupled to a backplane within a communications device, the card  
comprising:

an internal interface coupled to a backplane bus;

an external port coupled to a telephone network, the external port operable to receive  
from the telephone network a request to establish a telephone call with a network device  
external to the communications device; and

a communication module operable to receive a first data packet from the backplane  
bus using the internal interface if the first data packet's destination address corresponds to the  
first MAC address, the communication module further operable to communicate a second  
data packet to another backplane card by associating the second data packet with a second  
MAC address assigned to the other backplane card and communicating the second data  
packet to the backplane bus using the internal interface, wherein the communication module  
is further operable to identify an Internet Protocol (IP) address associated with the external  
network device, to process data from the telephone call into digital data packets, and to  
communicate the data packets to the external network device using the backplane bus.

24. (Canceled)

25. (Previously Presented) The backplane card of Claim 23, wherein the communication module receives the first data packet from the backplane bus and communicates the second data packet to the backplane bus according to an Ethernet protocol.

26. (Original) The backplane card of Claim 23, wherein the backplane bus provides a dedicated bandwidth between the backplane card and a backplane switch.

27. (Previously Presented) The backplane card of Claim 23, wherein the communication module is further operable to communicate a third data packet to a network device external to the communications device by associating the third data packet with a third MAC address assigned to the network device and communicating the third data packet to the backplane bus using the internal interface.

28. (Canceled)

29. (Original) The backplane card of Claim 28, wherein the communication module is further operable to determine that the data packets include voice information and, in response, to assign a high priority level to the data by setting one or more priority bits in each of the data packets.

30. (Original) The backplane card of Claim 23, wherein the communication module is further operable to set one or more priority bits in the second data packet to indicate a quality of service level according to IEEE 802.1q.

31. (Original) The backplane card of Claim 23, further comprising:  
an external port coupled to a data network, the external port operable to receive a data packet associated with an Internet Protocol (IP) address; and  
wherein the communication module is further operable to communicate the data packet to a network device assigned the identified IP address using the backplane bus.

32. (Original) The backplane card of Claim 23, wherein the backplane card may be coupled to the backplane and de-coupled from the backplane while the communications device continues to operate.

33. (Currently Amended) A communications device, comprising:  
a backplane;  
a plurality of backplane cards coupled to the backplane; and  
a backplane switch coupled to the backplane, the backplane switch operable to receive a first data packet with a first network address assigned to an external network device and a second data packet with a second network address assigned to one of the backplane cards, the backplane switch further operable to use a network protocol associated with the first and second network addresses to communicate the first data packet to the external network device assigned the first network address and to communicate the second data packet to the backplane card assigned the second network address, wherein the backplane switch communicates the second data packet to the backplane card using the backplane, wherein at least one backplane card is a gateway card coupled to a data network, the gateway card operable to receive data packets associated with an Internet Protocol (IP) address and to communicate the data packets to an external network device assigned the associated IP address using the backplane switch.

34. (Previously Presented) The communications device of Claim 33, wherein the network addresses are standard-based network addresses.

35. (Previously Presented) The communications device of Claim 33, wherein:  
the network addresses are Media Access Control (MAC) addresses; and  
the network protocol is an Ethernet protocol.

36. (Previously Presented) The communications device of Claim 33, wherein the backplane includes a plurality of backplane buses, at least one of the backplane buses providing a dedicated bandwidth between the backplane switch and one of the backplane cards.

37. (Previously Presented) The communications device of Claim 33, wherein at least one backplane card is a gateway card coupled to a telephone network, the gateway card operable to receive from the telephone network a request to establish a telephone call ~~with an~~ with the external network device, to identify an Internet Protocol (IP) address associated with the external network device, to process data from the telephone call into digital data packets, to associate the data packets with the identified IP address, and to communicate the data packets to the external network device using the backplane switch.

38. (Previously Presented) The communications device of Claim 37, wherein the external network device is an IP telephone.

39. (Previously Presented) The communications device of Claim 37, wherein:  
the gateway card is further operable to determine that the data packets include voice information and, in response, to assign a high priority level to the data packets by setting one or more priority bits in each of the data packets; and  
the backplane switch is further operable to communicate the data packets including voice information according to the assigned priority level.

40. (Previously Presented) The communications device of Claim 33, wherein the backplane switch is further operable to examine one or more priority bits in the first data packet, to identify a quality of service level associated with the priority bits according to IEEE 802.1q, and to communicate the first data packet according to the identified quality of service level.

41. (Canceled)

42. (Previously Presented) The communications device of Claim 33, wherein at least one of the backplane cards may be coupled to the backplane and de-coupled from the backplane while the communications device continues to operate.



43. (Currently Amended) A method of communicating data using a communications device, the communications device including a backplane coupled to a backplane switch and a plurality of backplane cards, the backplane switch coupled to at least one network device external to the communications device, the method comprising:

receiving, at the backplane switch, a first data packet with a first network address assigned to the external network device and a second data packet with a second network address assigned to one of the backplane boards;

using a network protocol associated with the first and second network addresses to communicate the first data packet from the backplane switch to the external network device if assigned the first network address and to communicate the second data packet from the backplane switch to the backplane card assigned the second network address using the backplane;

receiving from a telephone network a request to establish a telephone call with the external network device;

identifying an Internet Protocol (IP) address associated with the external network device;

processing data from the telephone call into digital data packets;

associating the data packets with the identified IP address;

communicating the data packets from a backplane card to the backplane switch; and

communicating the data packets to the external network device using the backplane switch.

44. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 43, wherein the network protocol is a standard-based network protocol.

45. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 43, wherein the first and second network addresses are Media Access Control (MAC) addresses.

46. (Original) The method of Claim 43, further comprising providing a dedicated bandwidth between the backplane switch and at least one of the backplane cards using a backplane bus.

47. (Canceled)

48. (Original) The method of Claim 47, wherein the external network device is an IP telephone.

49. (Original) The method of Claim 47, further comprising:  
determining whether the data packets include voice information; and  
assigning a high priority level to the data packets by setting one or more priority bits in each data packet in response to determining that the data packets include voice information.

50. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 43, further comprising:  
examining one or more priority bits associated with the first data packet;  
identifying a quality of service level associated with the priority bits according to IEEE 802.1q; and  
communicating the first data packet from the backplane switch according to the identified quality of service level.

51. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 43, further comprising:  
receiving a third data packet from a data network;  
identifying an Internet Protocol (IP) address associated with the third data packet;  
communicating the third data packet from a backplane card to the backplane switch;  
and  
communicating the third data packet from the backplane switch to an external network device assigned the identified IP address.

52. (Original) The method of Claim 43, wherein at least one of the backplane cards may be coupled to the backplane or de-coupled from the backplane while the communications device continues to operate.

53. (Currently Amended) A backplane switch coupled to a backplane of a communications device, the communications device having a plurality of backplane cards coupled to the backplane, the backplane switch comprising:

a plurality of internal ports, each internal port associated with a backplane card and operable to communicate with the associated backplane card using the backplane;

at least one external port associated with a network device external to the communications device and operable to communicate with the external network device; and

a processing module coupled to the internal ports and the external port, the processing module operable to receive a first data packet with a first network address assigned to the network device, to identify the external port associated with the network device, and to communicate the first data packet to the external port for communication to the network device using a network protocol, the processing module further operable to receive a second data packet with a second network address assigned to a backplane card, to identify one of the internal ports associated with the backplane card, and to communicate the second data packet to the identified internal port for communication to the backplane card using the network protocol;

wherein the backplane card is a gateway card coupled to a data network, the gateway card operable to receive data packets associated with an Internet Protocol (IP) address and to communicate the data packets to an external network device assigned the associated IP address using the backplane switch.

54. (Original) The backplane switch of Claim 53, wherein the first and second network addresses are standard-based network addresses.

55. (Previously Presented) The backplane switch of Claim 53, wherein:  
the first and second network addresses are Media Access Control (MAC) addresses;  
and  
the network protocol is an Ethernet protocol.

56. (Original) The backplane switch of Claim 53, wherein the backplane includes a plurality of backplane buses, at least one of the backplane buses providing a dedicated bandwidth between an internal port and an associated backplane card.

57. (Previously Presented) The backplane switch of Claim 53, wherein the external port is coupled to a network switch serving a plurality of external network devices and is further operable to communicate the first data packet with the first network address to the network switch for communication to the network device assigned the first network address.

58. (Original) The backplane switch of Claim 53, wherein the backplane switch is further operable to examine one or more priority bits in the first data packet, to identify a quality of service level associated with the priority bits according to IEEE 802.1q, and to communicate the first data packet according to the identified quality of service level.

59. (Original) The backplane switch of Claim 53, wherein at least one of the backplane cards may be coupled to the backplane and de-coupled from the backplane while the communications device continues to operate.